

16 September 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: Ambassador Douglas Heck  
Director, Office to Combat Terrorism

FROM

:

(OUR PSYCHOLOGIST WITH 25X1A  
WAS ON STATE TASK FORCE,  
AND WHO REFERRED TO - NOT  
BY NAME - IN PRESS.)

SUBJECT

:

TWA Hijacking

1. As a participant in the management of the recent TWA hijacking, I would like to communicate to you a few of my thoughts regarding the handling of the incident. I first want to express my appreciation for the opportunity to work with you, and I congratulate you on your performance in a most difficult role. I believe the outcome of this incident should be considered successful in that a minimum number of casualties were sustained and the perpetrators were apprehended for prosecution.

2. Organizational problems became apparent very early. I do not believe that the command and control aspects were understood in the same way by all the parties concerned. FBI and FAA apparently have a reasonably well worked out jurisdictional agreement for domestic skyjacking; when this event became international, and the Department of State "took control," the apparent change in leadership was probably resented and compounded an already difficult leadership problem. Indeed, the two organizations that had the most control over the incident (TWA and host government) were the least subject to influence by State decisions. In developing a better organizational response to this type of incident it must be made very clear where the final authority lies, and a system to involve better liaison with the private sector should be considered. However, although jurisdictional problems can probably be solved by drawing up appropriate agreements among Agencies, operational success cannot be assured until there is mutual trust among the actors involved. This can only be achieved on the personal level. Stated simply, it means knowing whom to call for whatever information or action is desired. This ability seemed to be sadly lacking during this incident.

3. The logistical and communication problems at the State operation center were solved to a great degree by moving to the FAA. The implications for developing a better physical plant are clear.

4. The frustrations that always occur in an incident of this nature generate a good deal of anger. In this incident several scapegoats developed, among which were the CIA, FBI, New York Police Department, Government of France, etc. This is not necessarily a bad thing, for discharge of anger in one direction can be important to prevent its being discharged in a potentially more dangerous direction. However, it can also be counterproductive in preventing the free flow of ideas and information. Again the issue of trust is important.

5. What I consider to be a potentially very dangerous example of the development of frustration occurred toward the end of this incident. This was at the time when we were receiving information that the skyjackers on the aircraft were resistant to the suggestions of their comrade in the tower to give up. I noted at that time a surge of impatience on the part of many of the people in the command center. Of course, this is quite understandable. The skyjackers had been teasing us, and each time we anticipated their surrender they disappointed us. At this point there was talk in the room of the French storming the aircraft. What happened is that the phenomenon that we often attribute to police forces began to occur in the presumably detached and objective observers and decision makers. An intolerable feeling of impotence and passivity was dealt with by a wish for action, and the concept of delay was all but forgotten (momentarily).

6. The problem of the interpretation and implementation of U.S. Government policy raised its ugly head throughout the incident. We have all talked about this at great length, and I know that you are aware of the importance of its resolution. One important aspect of it appeared to go unnoticed. It has to do with the responsibility of the host government. When the terrorists requested to speak to one of several U.S. Government officials, and we responded affirmatively, I am not aware that there was any consultation with the Government of France

about our decision. If there was none, it appears to me that this would amount to usurping some of the responsibility for which we hold them accountable. I wonder if this may explain in part some of what appeared to us to be French intransigence, especially with respect to facilitating our communications.

7. I have spoken to you (both before and during the current incident) of some of the problems that arise in a crisis of this nature. The above points are not all inclusive, and I hope we have an opportunity to discuss them in greater detail.



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